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A CITIZENS' REVIEW BOARD FOR TEACHERS.

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IN A DIALOGUE ON THE VALUE OF ESTABLISHING A CITIZENS REVIEW BOARD WHICH WOULD HAVE A VOICE IN SELECTING AND RETAINING TEACHERS IN GHETTO SCHOOLS, TWO OPPOSING VIEWS ARE STATED BY A PARENT INVOLVED IN NEW YORK CITY'S I.S. 201 SCHOOL CONTROVERSY, WHICH STIMULATED THE IDEA OF A REVIEW BOARD, AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE LOCAL CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS. THE PARENT BELIEVES THAT THE SCHOOL SYSTEM SHOULD BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FAILURE OF THE CHILD IN THE GHETTO SCHOOL, WHICH SHOULD ACCEPT HIM "ON HIS OWN TERMS" RATHER THAN FORCE HIM TO CONFORM TO THE VALUES OF THE DOMINANT SOCIETY WHICH THE SCHOOL REPRESENTS. A COMMUNITY EDUCATIONAL COUNCIL COULD ENGAGE WITH THE BOARD OF EDUCATION TO REVIEW JOINTLY THE HIRING PRACTICES AND THE QUALIFICATIONS OF STAFF IN GHETTO SCHOOLS AND THUS GUARANTEE THAT THE SCHOOLS WILL BE EDUCATIONALLY SOUND. WHILE SUPPORTING THE RIGHT OF CITIZENS TO PROTEST THEIR GRIEVANCES AGAINST TEACHERS, THE PRESIDENT OF THE LOCAL TEACHERS UNION OPPOSES PARENT OR COMMUNITY REVIEW OF TEACHER EMPLOYMENT OR PERFORMANCE. HE FEELS THAT A PROGRAM SHOULD BE DEVELOPED WHICH WOULD ERASE THE CAUSES OF THE FAILURE OF THE PRESENT EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM WHICH HAVE PRECIPITATED THE NEED FOR THE REVIEW BOARD. AMONG OTHER CHANGES SUCH A PROGRAM WOULD ESTABLISH INTERNSHIPS FOR TEACHERS, INCREASE THE USE OF SUBPROFESSIONALS IN THE SCHOOLS, AND MAKE CHANGES IN THE PRESENT SUPERVISORY SYSTEM. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "AMERICAN TEACHER," VOLUME 51, NUMBER 4, DECEMBER 1966. (JL)

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A Citizens' Review Board for Teachers?

David Spencer and Al Shanker

Growing out of—but not limited to—the I.S. 201 controversy in Harlem is an increasing demand for power in the operation of the schools by parents in ghetto communities. Among other things, some parent groups have called for a voice in making decisions on the selection and retention of teachers and supervisors.

For teachers, this demand means some painful soul-searching. Just how far can "professional autonomy" be stretched? Can it be used to shield teachers and administrators who are not meeting the needs of the children in their community? Are there untried avenues of parent-teacher cooperation that can be used to solve the continuing crisis in Northern ghetto education?

Discussion on these matters will quicken in coming months. To furnish teachers with some penetrating viewpoints on the subject of teacher-community relationships, the AMERICAN TEACHER has asked three authorities to address themselves

terms rather than to force the children to accept, understand, and conform to the terms of the larger society.

While there must be a basic acceptance of responsibility for education by the school system and a reorientation of its approach to ghetto children, there must be created an effective mechanism for community participation in the life of ghetto schools. In suggesting this, we are not radically departing from the basic school-community relationship that prevails in most school systems across our country. We are only insisting that the mechanisms that may work for white communities — school boards, parent-teacher associations, parent associations, etc. — do not effectively operate in the ghetto. The reasons for this are many; the fact is undisputable. The problem is for the school to be transformed from an alien institution imposed on the community by the larger society—as it is now—to an institution integrally rooted in the very fabric of the ghetto community. To achieve this, a structure for significant community participation in the operation of the public schools must be established.

COMMUNITY COUNCIL

At Intermediate School 201 we had agreed with the superintendent of schools on a community educational council which would have responsibility for "engaging jointly with the board of education of the city of New York in the following:

- Staff: developing the qualifications for each staff position; screen and recommend for assignment from among those candidates meeting the agreed upon qualifications; and the rejection of any candidate if there were sound, serious objections to his assignment by either the Council or the Board.
- Program: recommend goals and standards for the instructional program and develop the program to carry out these goals.
- Fiscal: explore the possibility of contracting for the provision of certain services.
- Evaluation: design a plan for the evaluation of the school's program looking toward an annual evaluation of the school, including recommendations for

education?

Discussion on these matters will quicken in coming months. To furnish teachers with some penetrating viewpoints on the subject of teacher-community relationships, the AMERICAN TEACHER has asked three authorities to address themselves to this question. They are David Spencer, chairman of the parents' negotiating committee at I.S. 201; Al Shanker, president of the United Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 2; and Alan Reitman, associate director of the American Civil Liberties Union. It is hoped that their comments will stimulate AT readers to respond to the points they raise.

A Parent's View

By DAVID SPENCER
Chairman, Negotiating Committee
I.S. 201 Parents Group

The controversy over I.S. 201 raised two questions fundamental to the education of Negro and Puerto Rican children: the need for standards against which to judge the performance of the professional staff of the school system and a framework of accountability to uphold those standards; and the establishment of a viable instrument for parents and community people to assume responsibility for and to participate directly in the life of the public school.

SCHOOLS FAILING

There is no disagreement that public schools in the ghetto are failing to equip Negro and Puerto Rican children so that they can effectively compete with white children for advanced training and employment opportunities. In the past, the blame for the school systems' failure has been laid upon the ghetto community — its broken family life, poor housing, depressed economy — that is, its non-white non-middle-class social-cultural framework. We do not believe that the failure of ghetto students to achieve is due to inherent inadequacies within their poor minority communities but rather to inadequacies within the school system which is failing the children.

Too many pilot projects, after-school reading centers, and "exceptional" school situations have demonstrated that poor Negro and Puerto Rican children can be motivated and can achieve if appropriately taught. We maintain that the school system must accept the full responsibility; the school system must establish standards of acceptable performance for its staff which will use as part of the criteria the achievement levels of the students.

We believe that holding teachers directly responsible for the achievement of children suggests many possible changes in the present educational system: the necessary decentralization of large systems; a flexibility in programming for children from different racial, cultural, economic backgrounds; compulsory training for staff going into ghetto schools (for we believe that the teachers and not the community are inadequate and "culturally deprived"); the exploration of new patterns for education, e.g. an extended school day or year, educational centers around the community outside of the school itself, and a greatly expanded use of indigenous sub-professionals. All these suggest that the system be reoriented to begin to approach ghetto children on their own

contracting for the provision of certain services.

● Evaluation: design a plan for the evaluation of the school's program looking toward an annual evaluation of the school including recommendations for improvement."

The community educational council tentatively agreed upon was to include parents from the school, representatives from community organizations, and educational experts chosen by the former to serve as consultants and advisors. The question of staff and supervisory personnel also serving on the council had not been resolved, although there was general agreement that staff might participate without a vote.

Let us be clear on the framework within which the Harlem communities were demanding a voice in the operation of the school: for years they had been fighting for integrated, quality education. The board of education, backed by the mayor, had said that they could not deliver integration in ghetto schools. At the same time, in spite of new programs and pilot projects, achievement levels of children in Harlem had declined to a low of 87 percent below reading level and 75 percent high school dropouts. In response to these realities, the community was in effect saying, "All right, we'll take our education segregated-style, but we must have a decisive voice in determining what happens in our segregated ghetto schools."

Frankly, we were surprised when there was such massive opposition to our community educational council. What is so disturbing about the idea of local parents and community residents participating in the screening of potential staff members? Why should the United Federation of Teachers object so strenuously? Are teachers afraid to be held accountable for their performance? We beleive that, in most communities, teachers are, in fact, accountable for the achievement of their students. We are demanding the same protections for our children that other communities already exercise.

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SOMETIMES, when education becomes so segregated, so lacking in substance, and so meaningless to the people it is supposed to serve, the community reacts simply. Thus, in Seattle, last year, a boycott of public schools was called by the Negro community, with the backing of the Seattle Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 200. These photos show activities in Freedom Schools, set up to provide interracial educational activity in churches and community centers and staffed by many AFT teachers.

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The same holds true for the establishment of educational goals and standards and the procedures for evaluating the school's performance. We want to be able to select those educational experts and institutions which we trust to develop and evaluate programs and staff effectiveness. We are not suggesting that parents be able to "hire and fire" personnel or "dictate what is to be taught." But we are demanding the right to directly participate in these and all the other facets of the school's life that affect the education of our children.

Finally, such a structure for community participation will not only make possible the participation of the ghetto community, it will demand that the ghetto community assumes responsibility for the education of its children. As our society is presently structured, the institutions that impinge upon the lives of the people of the ghetto are entirely independent of the community. Self-determination is so remote a possibility as to be meaningless to vast numbers of people. We are saying that society must create the structures that place a significant burden of responsibility for the education of ghetto children upon their parents and the community itself. Only then will there be a realistic possibility for breaking the destructive

that their grievances are effectively heard, were to deny this right to citizens. We should support some procedure for citizens to present their grievances against public officials including teachers. The acceptance of such procedures for citizens obviously includes the protection that the mere presentation of accusations does not constitute definitive proof and that the public employee is entitled to the usual juridical rights. (For full discussion of citizen complaint procedures see Walter Gellhorn's When Americans Complain and Ombudsmen and Others, Harvard University Press, 1966.)

TEACHER REVIEW

But this is not usually what is meant by a "teacher review board." What is usually meant is a procedure whereby parents and community groups may hire and fire members of the professional school staff and judge their competence, performance and qualifications. This demand must be viewed as symptomatic of the bitterness and frustration which is increasing in the ghetto, for the parents who make such demands do not really want to hire, fire or supervise teachers. They want their children to learn. They want a school system which will educate. They want the next generation to be able to take advantage of new opportunities.

These parents are tired of hearing excuses. They want their children to learn. They want a school system which will educate. They want the next generation to be able to take advantage of new opportunities.

responsibility to develop a program which will eliminate the very real underlying causes which are the basis for the review board demand. In developing a program we must honestly confront parents and the community with the failures of the present system—teachers have no reason to offer defensive excuses. We must say to parents:

- Success or failure for your children depends upon what goes on in the classroom. We should reject efforts to create the illusion that after-school activities, summer programs and remedial work can undo the damage caused by failure in the classroom. If we are to demand quality in the classroom there is no substitute for adequate compensation to attract and retain teachers and class size small enough so that each child receives individual instruction. (Federal aid monies should have been used to make education more effective in the classroom instead of trying to remedy failure after it's too late.)

- Teachers want to teach, but many don't know how. College courses do not produce teachers. Many teachers, after great effort, give up. Unsuccessful techniques of teaching are replaced by successful techniques of survival in the classroom. Teachers need help on the job. Teachers need an internship, the help and support of successful colleagues.

community. Self-determination is so remote a possibility as to be meaningless to vast numbers of people. We are saying that society must create the structures that place a significant burden of responsibility for the education of ghetto children upon their parents and the community itself. Only then will there be a realistic possibility for breaking the destructive cycle of poverty, miseducation, discrimination, and all their related problems.

Direct community participation in the operation of the public schools is our right as American citizens. It will provide a meaningful framework for community responsibility. We believe it will bring about a dramatic improvement in our children's education. It is the obligation of a democratic system to provide such a means of determination and indeed, of self-preservation. For our children are dying; we can no longer passively watch them be destroyed.

A Teacher Speaks

By AL SHANKER
President, United Federation of Teachers

There is increasing discussion of a citizens' review board for teachers, but the precise nature and function of such a board remains somewhat unclear.

COMMUNITY COMPLAINTS

Some who propose the idea point to numerous parental and community complaints which deal with statements on the part of teachers which indicate prejudice and which are offensive to minority groups. Other complaints range from the use of corporal punishment to extreme discourtesy. Basically, these complaints are not directed at the teacher qua teacher, but rather at the unpleasant encounters between citizens and public employees. (Citizens might well experience similar difficulties with police, welfare workers, housing administrators, etc.)

Clearly, citizens do have grievances against public officials and employees—including teachers and, it would be ironic if teachers, who are fighting to make sure the bitterness and frustration which is increasing in the ghetto, for the parents who make such demands do not really want to hire, fire or supervise teachers. They want their children to learn. They want a school system which will educate. They want the next generation to be able to take advantage of new opportunities.

These parents are tired of hearing excuses. They have been subjected to excuses, promises and programs but still their children fail. It is with this history that, tragically, many parents have turned upon the teachers. "Our children don't learn because they have bad teachers. If we could go into the school, throw out the bad ones, bring in good ones . . . everything would be different." The bitterness is rapidly growing into hatred so that the term "educational genocide" is becoming widespread and some parents actually believe that teachers commute from the suburbs to the ghetto daily determined to destroy their students.

MOST TRAGIC CONFLICT

This conflict between teachers and parents is most tragic. It is tragic because the parents do not see that massive educational failure cannot be explained by a simple good-teacher bad-teacher theory, for the truth is that both teachers and students are being destroyed by a rotten system. It is tragic because that system can be changed only if parents and teachers enter into a partnership for educational revolution—a partnership which is made impossible if parents blame educational disaster on bad teachers and teachers blame it on bad parents. (The situation is further aggravated in that labelling teachers in ghetto schools as "bad teachers" accelerates the flight of teachers from these schools and deters many others from accepting assignments. Teaching, in itself, is difficult; but to teach while engaging in a constant need to defend one's self against parental and community attack is impossible.)

CREATIVE PARTNERSHIP

While the demand for a review board is educationally unsound (and cannot be accepted) it is not enough for teachers to resist and reject this demand. We have a

don't know how. College courses do not produce teachers. Many teachers, after great effort, give up. Unsuccessful techniques of teaching are replaced by successful techniques of survival in the classroom. Teachers need help on-the-job. Teachers need an internship, the help and support of successful colleagues.

- The present administrative-supervisory system is a barrier to educational improvements. Principals are much more responsive to the administrative and clerical problems of headquarters than they are to the classroom problems of teachers and children. We should give serious consideration to changing this by having supervisors in each school elected for a given term of office by the tenured staff. Elections do not always produce the best people (neither does the present system), but elected principals would be more concerned with classroom problems than the prompt filing of clerical forms.
- Teachers are not able to teach classes in which there are children who are extreme discipline problems. A few such children in a class means that the total time and energy of the teacher must be devoted to containing these few while the class learns nothing. Unless it is recognized that teachers are teachers—that they are not psychologists, psychiatrists or social workers — we cannot move forward.
- The current shortage of professional personnel and the wide gap between teachers and the ghetto community point clearly in the direction of massive employment in the schools of people within each community to serve in what is widely known as "sub-professional" positions. Teacher aides and other positions should be under teacher direction for the purpose of enabling more effective instruction. The presence of large numbers of local parents will serve to acquaint the community with the real problems of the schools and should be the basis of closer teacher - parent - community ties. Since children learn as much from each other as they do from adults, we must continue to press for frequent contact between the

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poor and the middle class.

● In spite of current pessimism concerning the possibility of large scale integration efforts, integration must be furthered. Where it is not possible for one master plan to succeed, many smaller scale integrated activities should be provided for.

PARENT ACTION

Teacher review board? NO! But if teachers have a right to protection against citizen interference in professional matters, citizens have a right to expect professional solutions to problems which confront the community. Success depends not upon a vigilante witch hunt to weed out "bad" teachers but in creation of a system which will be supportive of actions which are educationally effective. Neither teachers nor parents have the power to bring about such changes by themselves. Together, they cannot fail.

The Civil Liberties Question

By ALAN REITMAN
Associate Director
American Civil Liberties Union

(Editor's Note: Mr. Reitman's organizational position is given only for purposes of identification. The ACLU originated the idea of public review boards for labor unions and the police, but has not taken any position on whether such a board should be created for teachers. Mr. Reitman's views are his alone.)

Independent review of the actions of governmental agencies which exercise vast power over the lives of citizens is a growing concept. Currently, the most dra-

tional system are more inherent in the myriad social problems that beset the ghetto, such as poor housing, unemployment, and family disintegration. These troubles, plus the failure—or lack of courage—on the part of the educational hierarchy to propose and vigorously aid such much-needed educational measures as massive remedial reading programs, prekindergarten classes and larger and better counselling services, are not issues which a review board ordinarily might be expected to tackle.

The arguments heard in opposition to police review boards can undoubtedly be voiced to fight a teacher review board: (1) There already exist internal procedures for processing complaints; (2) The educational function is so specialized that even the most prominent and well-motivated citizens who would be sought to make up the boards could not make sound judgments; (3) Teacher and administrative morale would be weakened, thus sapping the present level of efficiency; (4) The present procedures for disciplining teachers would be meaningless if the educational system surrenders its function to outsiders; (5) Political influence and the pressures that naturally accompany it would undoubtedly seep in and corrupt the administration of the educational system.

NATURE OF SCHOOLS

There is also the most fundamental argument, that the peculiar and sensitive character of an educational system can brook no interference from an outside source, one which would be invested with much of the same power that the professional system now has—the setting of hiring, firing, and other personnel practices or passing on matters involving educational curriculum. Such a review board would strike centrally at the idea that educational officials are guided always by the highest educational standards of scholarship and methodology, applied with appropriate sensitivity to the community's edu-

serve as a reprisal to attack educational administrators already laboring under severe handicaps and often a convenient whipping boy for general ills that plague society. A review board is an essential and unique instrument of the contemporary scene, required by the huge bureaucratic weight which all large urban institutions have developed in our time. The sheer mass of a large bureaucracy tends to discourage adequate self-criticism, and despite all the levels of supervision and internal review, the danger of defense of vested interests (or educational theories) always exist. Especially in areas of tense social conflict, the nature of any large institution makes it especially prone to self-justification. As Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare John W. Gardner commented on the organizational "dry-rot" that tends to plague all large groups of functionaries: "The individuals who hold the reins of power in any enterprise cannot trust themselves to be self-critical . . . the danger of self-deception is very great, the danger of failing or refusing to see the problems is ever-present and the only protection is to create an atmosphere in which anyone can speak up."

The atmosphere of frank and honest airing of information and opinion should pervade a public review board for teachers, not the idea that the board is an agency for punishment or a substitute for the existing educational structure—something it couldn't be in view of the clear legal authority and responsibility given to boards of education and their subsidiary units. It should be seen as a partner, an independent partner, to bring to public attention within the community the felt needs of parents, whether it be a teacher's unrelenting harassment (after repeated appeals to the principal) or the failure of educational policies. True, there are dangers,

position is given only for purposes of identification. The ACLU originated the idea of public review boards for labor unions and the police, but has not taken any position on whether such a board should be created for teachers. Mr. Reitman's views are his alone.)

Independent review of the actions of governmental agencies which exercise vast power over the lives of citizens is a growing concept. Currently, the most dramatic—and controversial — illustration of this idea concerns police malpractices for which such boards are proposed to ease the festering sores of police-citizen tension, especially in metropolitan areas densely populated by minority groups. As a forerunner, a few international labor unions in the 1950s adopted the public review board technique to deal with complaints from members that they were being denied the basic elements of internal union democracy, free expression, due process and non-discrimination. A new and broader version of outside review, borrowed from several European countries, is the Ombudsman plan which is being actively promoted in several states. This plan calls for the government to establish a "complaint department" to which an aggrieved citizen could go with an incident of mistreatment (which is thoroughly investigated) by any agency of government.

Now the wheel turns further and points, as I understand the proposal, to a public review board for teachers and educational practices. Offered as a fresh approach to resolving educational problems in a ghetto environment, the board would have considerable power, including the hiring, suspending or even firing of a teacher.

At first glance the analogy between police and labor union public review boards and a teachers' board seems a poor one. In the former cases the boards deal with overt abuses which are directly visible. For example, a policeman uses force to extract a confession or verbally berates a Negro or Puerto Rican; a union member is expelled for expressing and actively promoting a dissenting opinion. Apart from the psychologically-disturbed teacher who regards force as a proper disciplinary tool, the difficulties of an educa-

vested with much of the same power that the professional system now has—the setting of hiring, firing, and other personnel practices or passing on matters involving educational curriculum. Such a review board would strike centrally at the idea that educational officials are guided always by the highest educational standards of scholarship and methodology, applied with appropriate sensitivity to the community's educational needs. Quite legitimately, the charge of infringing academic freedom is bound to arise if such a board would meddle with the professional qualifications of school personnel to determine what shall be included in the curriculum and when and how it shall be taught.

All these are sound objections and can not easily be rejected. But when measured against the depth and breadth of "ghetto education," on balance I feel they do not tip the scales against a public review board for teachers. I say this provided that such boards do not, in their mandate or actual application, supplant the professional educational structure.

What are the values of an outside board, particularly to the parents and children of urban ghettos?

FORUM FOR PARENTS

It is generally accepted that many minority-group parents don't trust the white-administrated "system" of which the local public school is a demonstrable symbol. A public review board for teachers may well lessen community tensions by providing a forum in which parents can vent their resentment, whether it be about the inferior physical or instructional qualities of ghetto schools or the discriminatory attitude of teachers. Moreover, just as the police review board can deter infringement of constitutional rights by reminding policemen that an independent place exists to review their action, teachers who conceive their teaching function as merely "maintaining peace" may realize that their willingness and methods to reach the ghetto child may be open to inquiry.

A teacher review board could perform more than a "safety-valve" function, or

of the clear legal authority and responsibility given to boards of education and their subsidiary units. It should be seen as a partner, an independent partner, to bring to public attention within the community the felt needs of parents, whether it be a teacher's unrelenting harassment (after repeated appeals to the principal) or the failure of educational policies. True, there are dangers, present in any democratic forum, that in emotionally charged situations unsubstantiated accusations injurious to the person under attack will be leveled. This is why careful procedures must be incorporated into a review board's structure so that the full truth can emerge. This includes hearings which allow the right to subpoena witnesses, to counsel, and cross-examination of accusers. A reasoned and written report should be made of all decisions. Such independent investigations and reports, with power of recommendation only, if put forth by panels of respected citizens recognized for intellectual probity, fairness, and concern for education, may be a persuasive force in moving the educational hierarchy to recognize abuses that exist and to act to correct them.

APPEARANCE AND FACT

It can be argued that PTAs, even community education councils, now offer such an avenue for independent review and report. But as long as they are either tied to the school system, or regarded as such, they cannot qualify as a completely independent source of review. Just as the appearance as well as the fact of justice is an integral element of improved law enforcement in the ghetto, parents must feel that whatever grievances they hold can be heard by a totally impartial body. This is not to condemn every educational functionary, from teacher to board of education member, as biased and uninterested. It only recognizes the imperfections in all human beings, and the need within a still imperfect democracy to consider ways of presenting solutions to pressing social problems. The public review board idea is not a panacea for all of democracy's ailments, but it is one important technique for relieving the infections.